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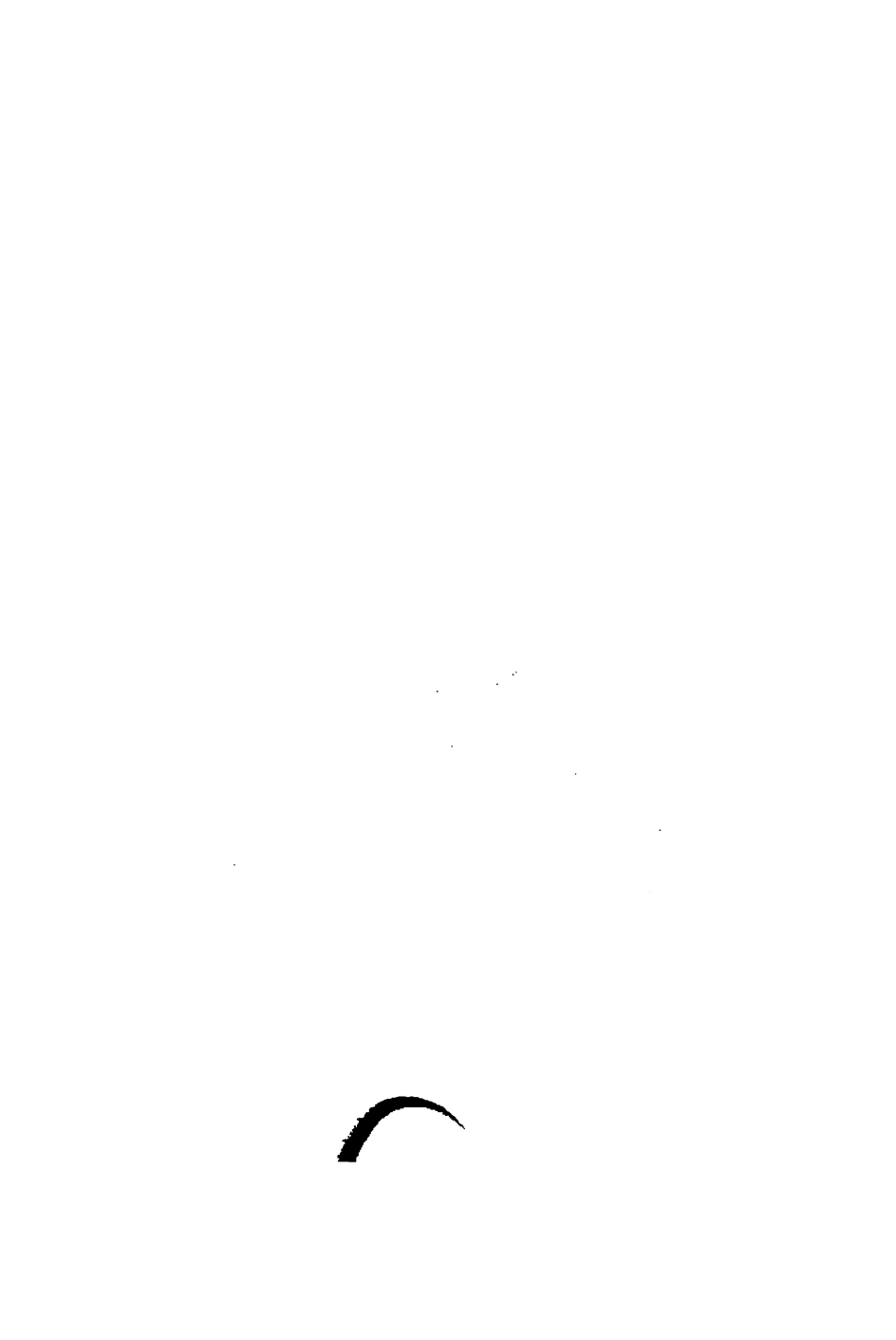
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POEMS

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POEMS

BY

LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE
//

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1901



PR 6037
A23A17
1901

COLSTON AND COY. LIMITED, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH



TO
MY SISTER

I HAVE to thank the Editor of *The Argosy* for permission to reprint the Sonnets entitled 'Nightfall,' and the Editor of *Literature* for the same courtesy with regard to 'Weakness.'

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POEMS

PAN AND THE MAIDEN

SCENE I.—*A deep wood in Spring*

THE MAIDEN

PAN, I have sought thee leaving the hot world,
And all the skein of tangled nights and days—
The mirth, the tears, the impotence of man,
Because I am very weary, and my heart
Wastes for thee, longing sadly for cool glades
And pleasant speech of leaves and quiet air.

(She pauses.)

Poems

I am tired, I am tired, oh, Pan ! the gods have
sown

New growths of men and days—new harvestings,
And the new fields are scattered with strange
seed,

And there are sterile songs and wasted breath,
And Beauty is a thing divorced from Life.

(She sinks on the moss.)

Hast thou forgotten, Pan, the days that were—
The quickening of woods, the tumult and fresh
joy

Of budding fields, the wild expectant hands
Of living new-born things which yearned to
thee,

The melodies frail reeds gave forth—desire
Of Love, mad ecstasy of song—faun-feet
Which danced tumultuous over bounding moss ?
Hast thou forgotten ? Art thou sleeping, Pan ?

Pan and the Maiden

And are thy glades deserted, and no more
Shall the delicious joy and surging mirth
Of laughing woodland women sound again?
Has it become a dream, a dream to thee—
And are thy lips hushed and the ancient hopes,
And all the happy moments of the world?

PAN (*in the distance*)

The old days call me with familiar lips.

THE MAIDEN

I who am one with thee and bound with ties
Inextricable of life to all the woods—
My heart the heart of saplings and my blood
Full of the warm desire of Spring for earth,
Now call upon thee, Pan, and all live things
Call on thee with dumb lips and pleading eyes,
Speechless and longing for thee. Slumber not

Poems

Lest the world die—lest the world die, oh, Pan !

PAN

One calls me from the unforgotten years.

THE MAIDEN

Oh, Pan ! the years are very sorrowful—
There is no splendour now amongst the gods.
There is no beauty of words, nor any more
Does song pour forth from ripe Olympian lips—
And like a dream forgotten are the gods ;
And like a ruined dream their temples are,
And sadder than the eyes of Hecate
The Gorgon eyes of sorrow freeze the world,
Crushing the soul of man and all good days.

PAN

I come. I come—one calls me—I must hear—

Pan and the Maiden

THE MAIDEN

Surely, oh, Pan ! though all the great gods slept
Still thou wouldst hearken—nay, thou slumberest
not,

Because the fields still quicken and the rain
Falls with a kindly freshness on the land,
And trees bear blossom, and the woods are full
Of manifold deep life and echoing sounds—
Fluting of wood-birds, buzz of drowsy flies,
Shy creatures crouching in the undergrowth,
Wild thickets bearing fruit and laden boughs—
Is not thy great existence evident
In all this Nature, since if thou wert dead—
If thou wert dead there would be no more life,
But barren deserts—overwhelming floods,
And forests crowned with no sweet growth of
green,
But hollow winds and empty silences.

Poems

PAN

The ancient years are living, and the songs—

THE MAIDEN

And now thy splendour fills me and the great
And sacred glory of thy words—the air
Conceals thy breath—thy thoughts enclose the
world.

This leaf I touch is a wise thought of thine ;
And all the grass a-tremble 'neath my foot,
And all the eloquent soft speech of leaves
Is thine, and most inseparable from thee.

PAN

Oh, Woman ! from the gulf of banished Time
You called, and my sleep left me—and I came.

THE MAIDEN

I am afraid, oh, Pan ! have mercy on me !

Pan and the Maiden

PAN

Who fears the gods when they command not
fear ?

THE MAIDEN

Ah, Pan ! the woods are slipping, slipping from
me !

PAN

Dost thou fear love and speech of ancient days ?

THE MAIDEN

The fear of thee is heavy on me, Pan !

PAN

Fear not, the old times live and the old speech.

THE MAIDEN

The new days blind me, burn me, fetter me !

Poems

PAN

Cast all their glamour from thee—I am here.

THE MAIDEN

This is the travail of death which brings forth
Life.

PAN

Pan dies not, nor the memory of Pan—
The great gods sleep—they shall not always
sleep—

Nor shall the world lose Beauty till it die.

THE MAIDEN

Oh, Pan ! thy words are fruitful memories
And madden me with thoughts of ardent days
And Greek nights, insatiate when the aston-
ished woods
Woke 'neath the maddened overwhelming cry

Pan and the Maiden

Of satyrs, and the air reeled, and the shout
Of Bacchanalian laughter twined itself
With silences of night, and the uncurled
Wild vines burst forth in leaf and made a green
And reckless arbour over the warm land,
And there was sound of flutes and pleasant pipes.

PAN

Exchange these memories for a newer bliss !

THE MAIDEN

Oh, Pan ! the gods rejoiced and laughed, and
cried
‘Behold the strength of Pan’—thy kisses live
Still, still upon my lips constraining me—
And they have quivered on my lips these years
Through all the changes which have veiled my
soul—

Poems

Through all the manifold great waves of Time—
And bid me cleave to thee, a creature wrought
Of woods and wilds and pastures and sweet
shades.

PAN

And thou shalt come, oh, well-beloved of Pan !
Seeing Pan's kiss is stronger than strong years,
And still the forest is green and still the roots
Bear grain and blossom, and the woods shall
cleave

Even to thy heart and thou shalt wander forth,
An evident woodland spirit, and thy life
Become a portion of the life of Pan.

THE MAIDEN

Oh, Pan ! there is great tumult at my heart—
Madness of life and all my words seem fraught
With wind and eloquent passion of green leaves.

Pan and the Maiden

But oh ! the years which lie betwixt us now
Weigh mournfully upon me, and the thought
Of new things veils the ancient—Pan, forgive,
The unimagined shades of life are on me,
And even now there cleaves a Love to me—
No boy of Aphrodite, but a thing
Terrible, grave, with deep, imploring eyes,
Which calls me to it for a last farewell.

PAN

Even Aphrodite slumbers, and her Loves.

THE MAIDEN

And I must seek it, Pan, and bid farewell,
Else it would haunt me and its eyes become
Fires, nor could any coolness of the woods
Nor fragrance quench the intolerable light.
But if I seek it, showing how my heart
Is only thine, and how the woods lay hold

Poems

And draw me to them, then, oh, Pan, its
strength

May wither and its ardent breath grow nought
But sleep among all sleeping human things.

PAN

Go not, lest the sad music of the world
Compel your spirit utterly from me.

THE MAIDEN

No music, Pan, in all the world is strong
To dim thy music in me. I whose life
First shaped itself upon thy lips—a note
Conceived of music growing visible
From very excess of rapture. Great art thou
To bind thy singing round all gods and men.
Hast thou forgotten how the god of song,
The marvellous Apollo, lay all day,
Motionless, dazed with visions, whilst thy notes

Pan and the Maiden

Led him through groves and labyrinths of sweet
sound

Till all his wise and beautiful heart was lost

And tangled in the melody ?—how then

Shall I prove stronger than he and feel thy song

No more but cleave unto strange words and
works

And alien, infidel hearts, and lose all love,

All knowledge of thee, Pan ? Such things are not.

PAN

Go, since the spirit of the world is weak,

Cold are the joys, the sorrows of the world,

And I am Pan ! and stronger than all gods.

Poems

SCENE II.—*A terrace overlooking woods and hills*

THE LOVER

EVEN as God's thought first formed and wrought
the world

With colour and sun and seas and hills and
woods,

So has my soul conceived and brought forth
Love

And formed a world of Love where all fair
things

Are born, and plaintive music and low words.

THE MAIDEN

The clouds are stiller than the hills to-night.

THE LOVER

They are filled with exquisite peace and no
desire.

Pan and the Maiden

THE MAIDEN

The woods seem living in the living night.

THE LOVER

They hold the gentle longing of the world.

THE MAIDEN

I hear the distant lonely voice of waves—

THE LOVER

Infinite seas of Love surround the world.

THE MAIDEN

And voices calling through the gloom—not
sprung

From aught of human nor sorrowful, but glad
With all the unpunished ecstasy of dreams,
And strange delirious joy of woods and hills.

Poems

THE LOVER

What cry is this—what lives are these, what
mirth?

THE MAIDEN

The cry of the unchangeable gods who send
A message to the world through thoughtless
lips—

The lives illimitable of strange hosts,
Dim denizens of undiscovered glades,
Impenetrable seas and drowsy hills—
Of these the mirth I hear—of these the joy !

THE LOVER

The old gods pass—and the old ways of men—
Theirs was the earth, and lust of Beauty and
Life,
Theirs was the earth a little while, and soft
Sweet perfumes and cool temples and wild loves—

Pan and the Maiden

A little time of laughter and warm breath,
A little space of pleasure and strained lips,
And afterwards the world put on new thoughts,
And the gods passed away like fallen foam,
And one great sacred spirit held the world.

THE MAIDEN

No, no ! they are potent still—they are potent
still—

Nor any alien island in far seas
Holds them—but in their ancient Halls of Mirth
They slumber, and their dreams are quickening
fires

Which hold the world from barrenness and death.

THE LOVER

Why are your eyes wild with a pagan light—
A strange and passionate language on your lips ?

Poems

THE MAIDEN

I am of them—I am of them—and now
I must depart, and I must wander forth
Through other fairer paths and holier woods.
I am not of this world, nor have my feet
Been glad in fruitful pastures—nor has Life
Seemed gracious unto me since Grecian days,
When Beauty lived and the old gods were strong.

THE LOVER

Oh ! my beloved, you are strange to-night.

THE MAIDEN

I sprang from them—my life is a mere note
Born of the windy music of Pan's reeds—
With happy feet I clove the forest shades,
Lived, loved, breathed, laughed and slept beneath
green boughs.

Pan and the Maiden

Then through the years I wandered, died and
lived

And died and lived again, full of new thoughts,
New loves and new desires, but evermore
Pan's seal was set upon me. Hold me not,
For I have seen him and his lips revive
The old earth-madness in me, and my eyes
Have gazed on him again and mine has grown
The soul of woods once more, and never strength
Of atheist hearts shall break or mar the bond.

THE LOVER

You speak a thing disastrous—fraught with ill.

THE MAIDEN

The old and passionate gods were dear to me—
My spirit is the spirit of a faun—
The wild vines and the ivy cling to me,

Poems

And the long tendrils wind around my heart
So that no other thought may sojourn there.

THE LOVER

The gods are perished—utterly undone.

THE MAIDEN

They live, but now they slumber and the world
Slumbers, but soon the petals of Time's flower
Shall blossom forth with colour and soft scent,
And like a rose shall overspread all lands.

THE LOVER

You have brought fire and anguish through the
years,
Malicious flames to sear and torture me.

THE MAIDEN

Be glad, because I bid farewell to you,

Pan and the Maiden

And I shall be most joyous if your love
Unwinds its coils of passion from my life,
Not fettering it, and I would have it sleep
Forgetting me with reasonable heart.

THE LOVER

This is an evil and a foolish thing—
Pan is not strong—Pan is not strong as Love.

THE MAIDEN

Pan can break Love and fetter Love with bonds.

THE LOVER

The ancient yearning is alive in you,
But I am strong with the new growth of days.

THE MAIDEN

Alas ! the growth is sad of the new day !
Yet think not I am heedless of your love—

Poems

Leaving it lightly as a thing outworn.
I should have withered in my loneliness
Had you not come with life and pitying love,
Had you not brought new love, new life to me.

THE LOVER

I gave you all I had and all my soul.

THE MAIDEN

Ah ! sweet, ah ! sweet the day I saw you first.

THE LOVER

Then was I conscious first of Life, and lived.

THE MAIDEN

I knew Life first when first you touched my hand

THE LOVER

I dared not think of you except in dreams—

Pan and the Maiden

THE MAIDEN

I writhed to feel that you could never love me.

THE LOVER

My love walked timidly with doubtful steps.

THE MAIDEN

And mine wept silent tears because Love came
not.

THE LOVER

You seemed too sacred for the speech of man—
The whole world's mystic heart was in your eyes.

THE MAIDEN

You read the whole world's lonely sadness there.

THE LOVER

What followed on that sadness when we kissed ?

Poems

THE MAIDEN

The transformation of all worlds and stars.

THE LOVER

Ah ! God, the peril, the peril, the madness of it—
Now it must pass, now it must pass—ah, God !

THE MAIDEN

Would you could read my heart and understand !

THE LOVER

Oh ! my beloved—is it nought to you
The first imperfect sighs, which breathed of
Love,
Timidly, daring but to live—no more—
The clasping of hot hands which burned to meet,
The mingling of tired lips which sobbed to kiss—
The life that makes its own eternity—
What is the god's wild rapture to this thing ?

Pan and the Maiden

THE MAIDEN

I love you—oh, I love you—blame me not !

THE LOVER

The gods have nothing left to give, the world
Faints even before my love, and we shall die,
Beloved, if you will, and cast our souls
Upon the eternal never-ending waves
Which beat around the awful feet of God.

THE MAIDEN

Oh ! I am fearful of your words—they burn.

THE LOVER

Or we will leave the greyness of sad days
And seek those countries of the god's first birth,
Where the tired sky yearns downwards to green
trees,

Poems

Raise Pan a temple and a dwelling-place
Wrought of cold marble twined about with
 flowers,
Wild woodland plants, vines, sinuous ivy stems,
And on his altars sacrificial grain
Shall burn, and incense scent the heavy air—
That he seeing we forget him not may grant
Forgiveness and accomplishment of joy.

THE MAIDEN

Pan needs no temple fairer than the world—
The whole world is his temple and the trees
His wreathed columns, and the fields are his,
Glowing with living offerings and prayers,
The scent of earth his incense—but he craves
All tremulous woodland hearts to blend with
 him,
And mine is full of woodland ecstasy.

Pan and the Maiden

THE LOVER

And mine of bitter agony and death.

THE MAIDEN

Ah ! turn your heart to Pan, and seek him too.

THE LOVER

I have drunk deep the bitter wine of Life,
And in my breast are wells of human tears,
Such as Pan tastes not, and my eyes have scanned
Words more profound than you can comprehend—
Words not of you nor of the thoughtless gods—
And I shall perish by a subtler death,
A subtler wound than you can ever know.

THE MAIDEN

I love you—oh, I love you, and my heart
Has known, it too, pale images of death—
And deeper thoughts, and holier hopes than those

Poems

Which filled it when the dancing fauns of Pan
Roused Bacchanalian laughter in the woods.

THE LOVER

Beloved, we are thirsting each for each,
But you are dazed with evil, and strange dreams ;
Yet seek strong shelter in my soul, for you
Will surely crave amongst these alien lives
Familiar sanctuary—you will grieve
For known accustomed days, the human lips,
The comforting speech of tears, the dear desires,
Close days of mortal rapture. They are hard,
These gods—they are warm with superficial
warmth,
And since they reigned the world has tasted
pain.

THE MAIDEN

Oh ! I shall sorrow for you, sorrow for you—

Pan and the Maiden

Almost I wish I had not bowed to Pan—
And yet—and yet—

THE LOVER

Look on the woods no more—
See the great moon has risen, and her light
Forgets the evil of men, and all their wrong
And folly sinks to some forgotten dream,
Some empty, fevered vision of waste hours,
And all this thing is but a perished dream
You have dreamt, sweet, and this alone is true—
My arms about you and my soul, your soul,
And Love, and a great gladness born of Love.

THE MAIDEN

Hold me close—close—I dare not raise my eyes.

THE LOVER

You are mine—you are mine—fear not, the gods
were strong

Poems

But love has overwrought the ancient gods
And seared their cruelty with a present flame.

THE MAIDEN

Take me away, I dare not linger here—
(*Echoes and sounds of voices rise from the woods.*)
Ah! what is that—ah! what is that? The
sound—
The old familiar sound of woodland mirth!

THE LOVER

It is the tumult of the evening wind.

THE MAIDEN

Their feet are dancing, are dancing, and the
sword
Pulses beneath innumerable feet—
See, see the wild gleam of the Mænad's hair!

Pan and the Maiden

Pan lives—Pan lives—Pan lives—Pan lives to-
night !

The fauns awake, the satyrs dance to-night—
Oh, tingling blood which stings and whirls
me on,
And hurls me to them—loose me—let me go.

THE LOVER

Never ! I hold you fast—you shall not leave
me !

THE MAIDEN

This one night, only this night, I will re-
turn—
Oh, my beloved ! I will come again,
But now my limbs are mad to wind themselves
With branches of the vine—the kiss of Pan
Burns on my lips, it burns my soul away—

Poems

Oh—oh, look not upon me, for your eyes
Are terrible—mournful, and your mouth is
sad,
And tortures me—Pan calls—Pan calls. I dare
not
Stay any longer with your lips and eyes.

THE LOVER

Though I shall die, you shall not leave me now !
(She breaks away from him.)

THE MAIDEN

Farewell—farewell, your love has fallen from
me,
And there is nothing left for me save mirth
And tumult of woods and pastures and wild
lives.

(She darts off.)

Pan and the Maiden

THE LOVER

You shall not leave me, though I die, you shall
not—

(He follows her.)

A VOICE IN THE DISTANCE

2 I come, oh, Pan ! I come—

THE POET

In pallid streams his life oozed out—
In the wild watching of his eyes
Sweet visions ever seemed to rout
A host of fevered phantasies—
Or struggle 'neath a vague surprise.

Upon his lips a silence lay
Which strove to speak and ever strove
To tear some blinding veil away—
A slavish fetter to remove,
Or some yet hidden force to prove.

The Poet

Beneath the faint far sky at night
 When a cold harvesting of stars
The moon reaps and the dim moonlight
 Pours down 'twixt cloudy prison bars
 He moved as one whom no grief mars.

And with wide rapture lost all sense
 Of self within the night's cool breath,
Grew portion of all things immense,
 Tides infinite of life and death,
 And those great words the ocean saith.

Or with the shadows of a wood,
 Or some deserted, treeless plain,
Mingled the throbbings of his blood,
 Loosing all human thought and pain,
 And things that grow and things that wane—

Poems

In knowledge of the clouds that flit—
Pale birds of Heaven, across the sky—
Time's slow hands weaving bit by bit
A manifold embroidery
Of all things born to live and die.

So was he fashioned that his thought
Suffered when something would annul
Those words his brain divinely wrought—
And left him, for the beautiful,
Merely dark shades confused and dull.

And all his suffering rose and drew
Pale phantoms on his anguished mind,
Which overcast and overthrew
His soul—as poisonous serpents wind
Their victims, so his thoughts would blind.



The Poet

Nor could he rest, nor weep, nor pray—

Only a company of mimes

Fantastical—in strange array—

His lips would summon forth at times,

Dim hosts of feebly-fashioned rhymes.

Yet once his soul with splendid fire

Broke every bond and fettering cord—

Beyond the reach of all desire

Sprang, as from out its sheath, a sword,

And clove the Heavens with a word.

No conscious music filled his soul—

Nor trembled on his lips—he grew

Beyond the reach of all control—

A hollow vase, from which men drew

God's wine, and nothing further knew.

Poems

Or as a flame which burns its way
Elate, through fields of scorching grass,
Nor knows its power to sere and slay,
Nor where its molten footsteps pass ;
Even thus his burning spirit was.

Where teemed a gulf of nights and days
Chaotic, he from the blank sod
Called from those shapeless, voiceless ways
Divinely as a fashioning god
Another world where Beauty trod.

Such was his recompense, but when
He gazed astonished at the thing
Wrought with pure fire of heat and brain
A surging tumult seemed to sting
His blood, and round his being cling.

The Poet

Not yet could he participate
In sweet accomplished work—his will
Stood with drawn weapon at the gate
Of his own Paradise, that still
The unfulfilled he might fulfil.

Nor, the abyss of chaos spanned,
Could he for any period rest—
Awaiting his creative hand
The thought of Heavens unpossess'd
Roused all the passion in his breast.

With yearning heart and eyes afire—
With tears and splendid speech imbued,
Scarce conscious of his own desire,
He endless world on world pursued
Of ever-growing magnitude.

THE DEATH OF BEATRICE

SEEING that Death spares not the Spring,
But even as of Autumn makes
Thereof continuous harvesting—
How should he strike not for our sakes
Who has no care for anything ?

Yet no wise as an enemy
Comes Death—but deeming that the soul
Is held in shamed captivity
Beneath the body's dark control—
He being stronger sets it free.

The Death of Beatrice

And since the Lady Beatrice was
Merely on earth a traveller—
Weep not ; she saw as through a glass
The earth, but ever would confer
With angels that in God's sight pass.

Half consciously she moved within
This world, not once her spirit grew
Clouded by any mist of sin—
But all things that around her drew
Part of her beauty seemed to win.

As though her spirit were a pool
Of such great virtue, all were saved
From some foul fever's loathed rule
If they their sickly bodies laved
In those deep waters hushed and cool.

Poems

No evil thing possessed her eyes

But rose transformed ; before her sight
Fear clad himself in Hope's disguise--

Hate turned to love, darkness to light,
And folly grew a thing most wise.

But who may know her dreams—too sweet

Were they for any spoken word,
Or any fancy incomplete

Of ours—they seemed the soft winds stirred
Round God's perpetual Mercy Seat.

Unfading harmonies and songs

Such chords of lovely music wrought,
Full of all sounds for which life longs ;

In all the pauses of her thought
No discord lived that mars or wrongs.

The Death of Beatrice

One who has seen a river flow
 Across some bare and songless waste,
Reflecting not the dearth below
 But the fair sky, has surely gazed
On her and striven her soul to know.

One who has loved a prayer which kept
 His soul (the prayer scarce understood,
Yet beautiful), when his strength slept
 In tortuous paths of wrong and good,
Has felt how through men's souls she stept.

Love made her spirit like his own
 Moulded in all respects to him
In loveliness and round his throne
 Her thoughts, most mystical, most dim,
Discoursed sweet songs like music blown

Poems

From holy heights, unguessed, untrod,
Save by an angel when he bares
His rapture in a living flood
Of such pure chords the music dares
Live only in the sight of God.

Ah ! Beatrice, what word have we
Sufficient—vainly do we speak,
And vainly sing—what song to thee
Of all our songs abashed and weak,
Shall wing towards Heaven worthily ?

Alone our silence speaks—more strong,
More passionate our silence seems
Than any chord of any song.
Oh ! Lady, take, oh ! take our dreams,
Moulding them even as we long

The Death of Beatrice

To magnify them—yet our praise

How shall it touch thee? Who shall weave

For thee around whose head the rays

Of the sun's splendour burn and cleave

Discordant crowns of earthly days?

One sings indeed, but his voice is

The very voice of sorrow; all

Death's most beloved mysteries

He takes and weaves a coronal

To crown the brows of Beatrice.

Slowly he comes now the pale shades

Of evening grow distinct, whilst still

The sun a flaming garland braids

Round the calm forehead of the hill,

And, full of sleep, the long day fades.

Poems

There runs no murmur through the street,
No voice of mirth, no hushed replies ;
And no man's sorrow incomplete
Breaks that grey woe that round him lies,
Or strives to stay his quiet feet.

God surely made beyond desire,
Even of an angel, his great soul,
And filled it with eternal fire,
And wrought for it an aureole
With flames for ever leaping higher

To flush the ages with their light,
Intense in power that should consume
Men's souls, and clear their darkened sight
Which Time's own fingers should relume—
His own breath blow the flame more bright.

The Death of Beatrice

He kneels beside our Lady's bier ;
And we who gaze as though a spell
Held us, half deem the steps drew near
Of very grief grown visible—
Sorrow made manifest and clear.

Lowly he kneels, thus murmuring,
‘Oh ! face, beyond expression pure,
Oh ! marvellous face, what offering,
What gift is mine ? How shall endure,
After the Spring, the songs of Spring !

‘How pale art thou, who conquerest Death !
Life sits beside thee winged and fair,
Thy silence quivers with his breath,
The wind is still and the quiet air
Full, full of the great words he saith.

Poems

‘ Oh ! Wonderful ! not even Love
May know thee, nay, not the white flame
Wherewith he writes all names above,
Shall spell the letters of that name
Thou—thou alone—art worthy of.

‘ Sleep on—I would not have thee wake,
For mirrored in thy sleep I see
Thy newer life, and the bonds break
Which lie athwart the soul of me,
And I even in thy bliss partake.

‘ Ah ! sleep, and let thy slumber guard
The courts and palaces of life,
That nought may hinder nor retard
My steps, nor paths unclean of strife
Lure me and leave my spirit marred.

The Death of Beatrice

‘Oh ! silence mystical—oh ! eyes
Silent ; oh ! silent lips ; oh ! hands
Most silent, hold me in such wise
That I may find those holy lands
She treads—cool fields of Paradise.’

And now the evening wanes, and one
Draws nigh, even as though he came
From out the portals of the sun,
With wings that burn like a great flame,
And feet which seem to spurn and shun

The earth ; who bending over him
That weeps, and her, in one the twain
Joins with a thread wondrous and dim—
Such as from out Love’s crimson skein
Unravel still the Seraphim.

WITCHCRAFT

To Effie

In clinging samite, poppy—lithe and red ;
With poppy garlands twined and interwed,
She passed before the court. Her languid head
 Seemed, underneath a falling cloud of hair,
Like a pale shadow born at close of day ;
Also her eyes were as the eyes of May,
 When the last Winter's frosts are mirrored
 there.

And every knight and lord who served the king
Felt round his soul a woven net-work cling,
As though enchanted by some evil thing
 Deadly yet sweet. E'en Arthur almost fell

Witchcraft

To love an alien woman, for a space
He gazed upon the beauty of her face,
Nor saw therein the loveliness of Hell.

Through bower and court a silence reigned the
day

Whereon she entered. August fever lay
On Summer splendour. 'Neath his fiery sway
All war-like jousts and tournaments, God wot,
Gave little joy. She passed within the hall ;
Great marvel filled the knights assembled all.
'Whence come ye?' cried the king. She
answered not.

Most strange it was to see her stand alone
Voiceless. The silence now oppressive grown
Seemed pregnant with an evil, yet unknown,
Fatal to life. Her lips were more intense
With secrecy than speech, she seemed to be

Poems

Delicious slumber, cloying every sense,
Which men despise and crave for equally.

Then Arthur's voice rang clear and audible,
As though to break the presence of that spell
Which held their souls with power invisible.

‘Damsel,’ he cried, ‘whence comest thou?’

The words

Died on his lips, but echoed hushed and
low,

As waters spellbound in their overflow,
Or muffled calls of Winter-famished birds.

Unanswering still, across her face a smile
Played like an Autumn twilight, all the guile
Of tempest hid therein. She breathed the
while

A keen quick sigh that startled every sense.
And those who gazed within her eyes beheld

Witchcraft

How strangely there the drowsy silence
 swelled,
Full of swift meaning, instant and intense.

And many yielded to that smile and leapt
Entranced to their feet. Her red robe crept
In clinging folds around her ; on she swept
 Along the mystic streets of Camelot.
Famed knights were they who followed :—
 Pelleas,
Gareth, and more (as phantom armies pass,
 So moved they), Tristram, Gawain, Lancelot.

Then cried the king, ‘ Alas ! my knights no
 more
Honour the vows they made, as heretofore,
They learn a newer life, a newer lore ! ’
 Sir Galahad and pure Sir Percivale,

Poems

With other knights of more enduring mould
Stayed still within the hall, though day waxed
old,

And mournful shadows brooded thin and pale.

‘Alas!’ the king made moan, ‘how little is
Remained to me of former might and bliss
Save fallen hopes and out-worn memories ;

And all my dreams, and every battle won
Over the heathen, and the holy love,
Wherewith to fill each knightly heart I strove
Oblivion soon shall claim in Avalon.’

Two days had fallen lifeless, little heard
Was Glory’s voice the while, but, ere the third
Languished towards night, resounding armour
stirred

The mournful streets ; with weary steps they
came,

Witchcraft

But how or where their yielding feet she led,
They nothing told, nor whence the damsel sped,
Nor what the honour won nor what the
shame. .

Yet, nathelless, though again in fealty
Each knight bowed head before the king's decree,
And exercised all wonted chivalry,
Such vice which in those breasts had taken
hold

Became accelerated, Lancelot's sin
With Guinevere grew much enhanced therein,
Gawain and Ettarre, Tristram and Isolde.

None knew from whence she came nor what
her heart

Contained of evil, when she drove apart
King Arthur's Hall by soft and hidden art ;
No token left she when she passed away,

Poems

Only a stillness subtle, infinite,
Was lifted as the trailing wing of night
Lifts, spreads and fades at quivered plumes of
day.

But :—Once towards the Court a woman sped
In trailing robes of clinging poppy-red,
And poppy garlands twined and interwed,
Deep-eyed and sorrowful with sombre hair
Sweeping her shoulders like a living thing ;
And for a moment's folly, even the king
Felt Love's forbidden breath ; she was so fair.

NIGHTFALL

THREE SONNETS

I. The Earth

PALE, patient, with her throbbing heart at rest,
Waiting with half-closed, half-expectant eyes,
Till slumber's lips shall cleave in pitying wise,
Full of sweet comfort, to her brows and breast,
She feels by one and one in the bright West
Fade the long trails of gold, and wavering shades
Leap from lone forests and forgotten glades,
And dance and shimmer at the moon's behest.

What change is on the fields?—the old known
land

Poems

Spreads, by some goddess of the twilight planned,
A cloudy world of formless trees and flowers,

Where with cool hands the placid gardener,
night,

Waters the blossoms of the pale moonlight
With quiet dews of unregarded hours.

II. The Sky

How far, how far, with unavailing eye,
Shall the frail sight grasp night's significance,
Or pierce the trackless, terrible expanse,
The vast and awful desert of the sky ?
If all the labouring world in one vast sigh
Melted and vanished from its ancient place,
Would any ripple stir the seas of Space,
Or the least echo sorrow in reply ?

Nightfall

Oh, Hand, which through a shuddering chaos
hurled

Star upon endless star and world on world,
Will thy dread sowing spring to harvest soon !

Now pregnant with the ghosts of æons past,
Through those unblossoming fields and pastures
vast,
The evident face of Silence, dawns the moon.

III. The Sea

Even if the veil of long Infinity
Were at some awful summons to divide,
The inexpressible gulf would fail to hide
The splendour and the passion of the sea.
These yearning chords will clash unendingly
When all the works and fruits of Time are
dead,

Poems

And only barren winds and waters spread
Where stars and moons and suns have ceased to
be.

Night, with a veil athwart her quiet face,
Bends where the impetuous waves and foam-
clouds race,
And gird the shore with shimmering zones of
spray.

Within her arms the moaning tempests rest,
And all the seas are gathered to her breast,
And all the lost and lingering tears of day.

WEAKNESS

He was not strong enough to break away
From ignorant bonds which hinder men and
blind ;

To snap the prison-bars of yesterday,
Or curb the natural follies of mankind.

Nature and Beauty called to him, but here
Old thoughts and aspirations bound him still—
Abortive hopes, and dreams confused and sere
Darkened the vague horizon of his will.

Part of eternal Beauty—crowned with light—
A thought of God—even thus and thus his
soul

Poems

Conceived itself—but subtle hands of night
Wove webs of shadow and obscured the
whole.

He heard the ages calling, and the skies
And mountains and, to greet him, song on
song
Of deathless poets, crowned with music, rise—
Yet swooned midst clashing chords of right
and wrong.

He sang ; one moment strong, with gasping
breath,
Rose high, then gazed where yet his prison
lay,
Grew faint to see what torture stretched
beneath—
Fell ; and his chains cling closer day by day.

AUTUMN

THE year bends low and plays
With thoughts of old dead days—
Old loves—old words—old ways.

To cheat her tired eyes
In gold embroideries,
And holy day disguise

Comes Death—yet ceaseless cleaves
Midst aureate ferns and leaves
The voice of her who grieves.

Poems

As one whose hopes aspire
No more, she seems—whose fire
Is fed by no desire.

As one whose cold hands stir
Grey dust and ashes sere
Within Love's sepulchre.

LORENZO DEI MEDICI

I who have wrought for Italy
 This casket holding many a gem—
Florence, whose beauty forms for me
 So marvellous a diadem—
 Sweet blossom of a fruitful stem,

Hold in my hand supremest right
 Of conquest over all who come
To kneel within my sovran sight ;
 The very eloquence of Rome
 Sinks at my feet disused and dumb.

Poems

Yet no mere court of shining lords,
No mere barbaric splendours spread
Around me—not with spears and swords
Is my rich progress carpeted,
A more enduring path I tread.

Great poets—great philosophers
Have bowed to me, and called me great ;
With the rich wisdom of old years
I mingle and participate,
And gauge steep gulfs of human Fate.

Once more, hid long by monkish spite,
Plato awakes from sleep, and, wise
In loveliness, his words invite
Weak man's obliterated eyes
To contemplate new worlds and skies.

Lorenzo dei Medici

The ancient fires and flames of Greece
Rise clear from out the fettering years.
Beauty impetuous release
Has claimed and freed her worshippers
From chains of ignominious fears.

And at my side stands many a one
Who works with dreams grown visible,
Coloured with lights of moon and sun,
Sweet words which night and morning spell
In shades and hues intangible.

And many more from the dumb stone
Bring forth divinest forms as when
The gods, from chaos pregnant grown,
Brought forth the world with subtle pain,
And first conceived the lives of men.

Poems

Lorenzo, the Magnificent—

Thus have men called me, and the sound
Poets in songs sublime have blent,
And throbbing echoes spread around
This name wherewith my worth is crowned.

Yet since no man can wholly rest—

Nay scarce the gods themselves can be
Quiescent, every care supprest
In absolute felicity—
A shadow watches over me.

Though I am arbiter and lord
Of Florence, and before mine eyes
Throng splendīd hosts of song and sword,
All things desirable and wise
Which the high gods immortalise,

Lorenzo dei Medici

Yet there is one who answered not,
 Though I, Lorenzo, went to him—
His soul revolves a subtle plot,
 A strong reality and grim,
 Conceived 'mongst dreams and visions dim,

To overthrow my power. Accurst,
 He holds this Florence changed and torn
In shameful depths of sin immersed—
 ‘Beware!’ he cries, ‘the judgment born,
 Oh, slaves, with the approaching morn.’

A ruined people, from whose tears
 God forms strong hosts to burn and scathe,
He sees, and from afar he hears
 A visioned army strong to save,
 Re-risen from dead Freedom's grave.

Poems

I heed him not, and yet would I
For anger at his stubbornness,
Hear him arise and testify
His love for me, and his lips bless,
Which now are stamped with bitterness.

The more because his soul contains
Live germs of that consuming fire,
Which turned to strength subdues and reins
Nations, or nourishes their ire—
Doing whate'er it may desire.

Thus were it well if he with me
(Since yet I hate him not) should stand,
And weave such webs of subtlety
That I might hold this difficult land
Safe in the hollow of my hand.

Lorenzo dei Medici

Yet I, Lorenzo, at whose nod

Princes might kneel who care not though

The Papal messenger of God

Should rise in wrath and call me foe,

In vain descended, stooping low,

To seek this Savonarola, yet

He with proud speech refused to hear

My words, as though his brows were set

With fairer gems and princelier

Than these imperious gems I wear.

This monk, this vassal lowly born,

Lorenzo, the Magnificent,

Received with insolence and scorn—

A pestilent beggar crazed and bent

Had found him scarce so insolent

Poems

As I ; from that same convent there,
Even of St Marco's, twice I passed
Thwarted ; no third time will I bear
To have my pleasure backward cast ;
His neck shall surely bend at last.

Lest men shall mock : ' Behold, how small
Lorenzo—seeing he sought to gain
The friendship of a monk—but all
His proffered favours fell in vain,
Cast back into his face again.'

Nay, this shall not be—I will rise—
Supreme in power and magnitude,
Nor rest until this proud monk lies
Conquered—until his lips have sued
Even for my beatitude.

Lorenzo dei Medici

Yet were it well a while to wait,

 This stubborn monk perchance may be,
Once snapped those links of wrath and hate
 Which hold him from my amity,
A worthy instrument to me.

And this *shall* be, for am not I

 Lorenzo, the Magnificent ?
Of whom all men shall testify
 ‘The greatest and the wisest bent
 Beneath his will obedient.’

DECEMBER

To Margaret

GREYNESS : the sea is still—

Still as a smooth grey glass.

Grey is the far-off hill,

Grey is the long, wet grass.

The trees have ceased from complaining—

And motionless stand ; the wind

Sleeps ; and the sun is straining

Through clouds like a god half blind.

December

Pallid the island seems,
A phantom, as though the day
Held fast one of night's pale dreams
Which fled not with night away.

Grey is the sky—the river
Reflects the face of the sky ;
The wings of a wild swan quiver
And creak as they rustle by.

Swans on broad pinions follow,
Great wings, far-reaching and grey ;
The living thoughts of the hollow
Sad mind of the brooding day.

Rain on the hills—on the fields—
The paths are heavy and drear ;

Poems

Dead harvests the dead wood yields,
Dead leaves for the dying year.

The month stands shoulder to shoulder
With Autumn and Winter, wet
Sad mists surround and enfold her ;
The sun of the year is set.

THE MAN WHO FOUND TRUTH

WHETHER the world was still consumed with
strife

He knew not, nor if Death still followed Life,
Nor what of loss or gain there was, nor birth,
What change or revolution held the earth.
Nor whether Love, with subtle songs and deep,
Yet lost men's souls, or if seduced by sleep
Love lay and yielded up his crown to Fame.
Only he knew that through the forest came
Long murmurs and sweet sounds of living things—
The babbling voice of thicket-hidden springs,

Poems

Drowsing of flies, winds musical and dim,
Where, full of sighs, the branches waved o'er
him.

And where the lithe and glowing bracken spread
He knew the intervening sunlight shed
A stream of shrouded gold which flowed between
The cool transparency of lucid green—
And evermore upon his sleeping eyes
Flashed the bright wings of morning as they rise
And make an opal of the waking skies.
And when the drowsy day, not wholly gone,
With clouds upon her forehead, lingers on
To welcome twilight with untroubled hands
And quiet eyes, wherein a presence stands
Of thought grown portion of the infinite—
He saw upon her breast the parting light
Flash like a jewel, and when twilight grew
A thing declared he heard the winds pursue

The Man who found Truth

With moaning cries sad clouds of brooding
gloom.

And how through dripping leaves and waste
perfume

Of torn lost flowers the beating raindrops fall
In measured cadence wild and musical,
And the sky heeds no more the earth's distress,
But more than all he felt the tenderness
Of twining weeds across his hands and feet—
Convolvulus, which panting still to meet
The Dryad's heart lays bare his own sad love
In heart-shaped foliage, and where perfumes
move

Evident almost, honeysuckle wreaths—
And nightshade, which from Proserpine receives
A deadly gift of slumber—passionate
Wild branching ivy and, insatiate
Still after Love, the twining clematis—

Poems

And on his ears fell ancient melodies,
Which Pan from earliest days has taught the
birds—

A wild confusion of indefinite words,
Echoes, for ever throbbing a reply,
Till all his senses were o'erwhelmed thereby.

For he had wandered deaf with the world's cry,
Searching that ancient, undiscovered spell
Mankind has sought from times unspeakable—
That one strong word the gods knew when
they wrought

All things from chaos with a mighty thought
Omnipotent, and men have named it Truth,
And it has sapped the ardour of their youth,
And all their days, long filled with grievous
pain,

And none has heard it yet, although the stain

The Man who found Truth

Of blood, which torn and questing hearts have
shed

Has turned the earth's green fields to bitter red.
And he with yearning soul from land to land
Wandered, and held earth's wisdom in his
hand,

And cried, 'Lo, I am wise !' and slept and saw
The shadow of an undiscovered law
Was all his wisdom, and the ancient years
Drew nigh with sacred mirth and pregnant
tears,

And eloquence of dim departed gods ;
And showed how earth's most lost and trodden
sods

Concealed some human world-wide heritage—
Some strange, deep memory of a former age.
Until with bended knees and eyes sublime
With wonder and new joy, he prayed to Time,

Poems

And found in Time no more a god at all,
But a poor jester at Life's festival—
And Life himself a misty king of shade—
And thus incontinent his spirit strayed
Ever from vain desire to vain desire
Till Life and Death became one raging fire
And sank to chaos, and above him leapt
Gaunt forms and all in vast confusion swept
Detesting light, then fearfully he cried :
'There is no truth—no truth, the gods have lied
To man in making man,' but sudden sleep
Soothed his sad fever, and where branches sweep
Careless above a silent forest glade
He lay and heard no more man's tired feet
climb
By slow degrees the burning steps of Time—
But slept, and saw in sleep the whole world
fade.

The Man who found Truth

And like the sea's monotonous slow tune,
Heard amongst dreams some burning afternoon,
Even as a broken wave the old life spent
Its strength and all its dull bewilderment
On the long wreckage of some hidden shore,
Whilst to his soul a voice spoke evermore :

‘ The Heavens are yours, the stars and all the
earth,

For you and they were of the selfsame birth
And all the suns and seas are one with you.
The little starving crowns that men pursue
Are wrought outside the boundaries of life—
What need, what need, what need is there for
strife ?

Man's spirit sprang from the same harmony,
The same perfection as the sky and sea—
What need, what need, what need is there for
strife,

Poems

Seeing the gods are quiet, and their hands
Weave from their quiet thoughts the cool green
lands

And soft continuous flow of life and death ?
Cease, cease a little while from fevered breath
And fear which of confusion travailleth,
And use the earth's pale beauty as a glass
Through which you may perceive the great
gods pass

Seeing the gods are wholly beautiful.
This thing alone he knew, that through the
lull

Of ceasing strife all beauty came to him,
And haunted his hushed spirit, and the dim
Sweet woodland rapture mingled with his blood—
And evermore, as some reposeful flood
Mirrors the passing clouds and bending trees,
So his receptive soul reflected full

The Man who found Truth

All Nature's manifest embroideries—

And growing perfected and beautiful

He saw, through Beauty's pale and mystic glass,

The quiet gods and all their wonders pass,

And where the drowsy notes harmonious fall

Of Life's still songs subdued and musical

He heard within the sound his own soul's call.

THE HELOTS

(SPARTA, 500 B.C.)

IN peace and in peril

They feed on our lives,

When the war-lust is sterile,

With lashes, with knives

They goad us, and rich with our life blood the
land waxes fruitful and thrives.

What pain can defeat us ?

What terror dismay ?

What passion may heat us—

The Helots

Degenerate clay,
Called forth at the bidding of princes mere
bodies to torture and slay?

We have sprung from the dust ;
Not of ours was the breed,
When the earth's barren crust,
As the great gods decreed,
Brought forth from its stones a new people
tremendous in purpose and deed.

We follow despair ;
In our eyes is no light ;
Cold shadows ensnare
And deaden our sight ;
We see but a darkness eternal—deep gulfs of
deplorable night.

Poems

Down-trodden, down-smitten

We live, for in death

Has a god's hand re-written

The evil Life saith,

The songs which Life sings in derision with

bitter and insolent breath ?

The greatest and fairest,

The lords of the earth,

Thou, Pluto, declarest

Shall share in thy mirth—

Shall laugh with thy laughter and slumber in

meadows of infinite dearth.

How then if the strong men

Thus prosper in Hell

Shall the outcast among men

The Helots

Eternally dwell ?

If the kernel is crushed and made shapeless shall
any take heed for the shell ?

Of dust the gods made us

And mocked us with life ;

In flesh they arrayed us,

And filled us with strife :

For a guerdon they gave us the fetter—for
pleasure the lash and the knife.

For freedom we pine not,

We claim no release ;

But we pray that the fine knot

That binds us may crease

Each sinew, each nerve of our masters with pain
that can fail not nor cease.

Poems

Our gods are not their gods—

We worship alone

Pale Dæmons and sere gods

Unpæaned, unknown—

Whose favour no incense may quicken, whose
anger no prayer may atone.

Not radiant Apollo,

Whose voice if men long

To hear and to follow

With glory of song,

Will scatter their souls as the sea-flakes, as foam
when the tempest is strong.

But a god of hushed weeping,

Of terrible mirth,

For ever unsleeping—

The Helots

The kings of the earth
He sees, and his anger is pregnant, his curses are
fruitful of birth.

Not crowned Aphrodite
Gold-girdled, is ours,
But a goddess more mighty
Who burns and devours
All love and is girt with a serpent—with thorns,
and sick nightshade for flowers.

No pale Dionysus,
No madness divine,
Can lure or entice us
With fury of wine
From the tendrils of bitter vine garlands, which
poison our hearts as they twine.

Poems

But a god of dull madness,
A god of the dead,
Who never from sadness
Of Hades was led
By Zeus, but treads where mere shadows have
trod and for ever shall tread.

All Pallas could tell us
We scorn in our hearts,
But strong to impel us
With clamorous darts
Of hatred arises a goddess who numbers each tear
as it starts.

Not Artemis claims us—
No servants of Pan
Are we, but one names us

The Helots

Whose fingers can span
The weapons of wrath and destruction—the
terrible godhead of Man.

Let them shrink from our gods,
Let them tremble, for we
Shall shatter their rods
And strike till the sea,
Till the earth, by their anguish made eager,
proclaim us triumphant and free.

They have urged us like cattle,
Like sheep have they slain,
But hate in the chattel
May guide as a brain—
Once quickened, the hand of the lifeless not soon
is made lifeless again.

Poems

The sword once arisen

Not soon to its sheath

Shall return, for its prison

It scorns when the grief

Of those it transfixes and tortures have brought
to its hunger relief.

They fear us—they hate us

These lords, and they keep

Stern watch to abate us—

(The river is deep,

The current is strong in its fury, the cliffs that
surround it are steep).

Though we serve them in battle

We laugh, for we hear

In our foeman's death rattle

The Helots

The sound of their fear,
The cries of their women and children, the
shriek of their doom that is near.

Ye gods, without pity—
Our gods are more strong—
Ye kings of the city,
Who goad us with wrong—
With wrong and with wild desperation, demand
of your spirits, How long ?

THEMISTOCLES

BENEATH the languid Eastern sun—
Where, from excess of perfumed heat
The sick air faints, and the hours run
From morn to night on fiery feet—
Exiled by impious decrees
I, far from Grecian lands and seas,
Move, who am called Themistocles.

I, who have conquered, find it good
To crave from those I overcame
Shelter—behold my lips have sued
For Persian kindness—and my fame

Themistocles

Polluted sinks, soiled by the breath
Of those whose peace is worse than death—
Whose speech all good deeds gainsayeth.

Prostrate lay Athens, cast aside
Her joy—as on a thing forlorn
Men gazed upon her failing pride,
Her visage pale—her raiment torn—
Yet, though the flowers drooped and shed
Their petals, still her sacred head
With violets was garlanded.

Yea, though the Persian from far lands,
With ships and armies manifold,
Came and his hosts and mighty bands
She saw—his horses and his gold—
His flaming jewels, his splendid state,
His swords and spears importunate
She seeing—left him desolate.

Poems

Yet I for Greece performed this thing—
My will made strong her will—the fire
Of my own spirit triumphing
Kindled with resolute desire
Her mutable and supple thought,
And from men's fear strong victory wrought,
Bringing their cowardice to nought.

Within the Bay of Salamis,
Most insolent the foeman lay ;
Now the cold sea waves curve and hiss
Over their heads, and alien spray
Gleams where their captains sleep—and
where
Their cries triumphant stabbed the air
The shrill winds wail of their despair.

Yet, Athens, though the gods have heard
Thy anguish, now thy plaints are dumb

Themistocles

And fruitless, and thy voice which stirred
Their wrath has grown most wearisome.
They hear no more thy prayers—to them
Thy love is but a fruitless stem—
Ingratitude thy diadem.

I was their instrument and thus
I, who their will accomplished
In moments deep and dangerous—
When the short love of men is fled,
Shall not be utterly forthcast,
Nor seek in vain, but strong at last
Reap passionate vengeance for the past.

Fear me, oh ! Athens—you are full
Of beauty, and against the skies
Great columns, white and wonderful—
Fair shapes of men and gods arise.

Poems

These I have loved—these touched—these
known,

Think, if my anger backward blown
Shall not for wasted love atone.

Your strong blood leaps—loud is the cry
Of victory. A mighty flood—
Century on mighty century—
Pours round your feet—oh ! calm your mood.
Fear—lest your fearless gaze shall scan
No longer stones Republican,
But strongholds of the Persian.

Think you your weapons cast aside
No hands shall gather, that the fire,
Hungry and still unsatisfied,
Fails and is quenched at your desire ?
I tell you nay—by others lit

Themistocles

The flame yet burns, and other wit
Shall mend the weapon, claiming it.

He who is wronged and bears his wrong
As though a crown were given him,
Within his soul is no life strong,
His lamp is quenched, his strength is dim—
Have the gods given for evil good,
Or unrevengedfully pursued
Blasphemy with beatitude?

Oh ! Greece, remember Marathon—
Behold again the mighty host
Dispelled—the immeasurable won—
The giant army crushed and lost—
Still wild, despairing on your ears
Falls their last cry—and lo ! your spears
Shall speed your glory through all years !

Poems

Yea, Greece, remember Marathon ;
For now the Persian hosts advance.
Fallen you lie—disused, undone,
With none to work deliverance ;
Now like a bleak wind from the North,
The gods' vast anger rageth forth !
Shall ye then stand against their wrath ?

Ah, conquerors, muse a little while !
Your slaves, your soldiers, what are they
But blunted tools your hands beguile
To serve, to perish, or to slay ?
How shall they serve you—ignorant, blind,
If some complete and mastering mind
Sways not their fickle ranks behind ?

Cherish your leaders ! What of them,
Your cherished leaders ?—one there is

Themistocles

Who urged the waves' loud requiem
Over the foe in Salamis.

Now from the foemen's hands he takes
Bread—and his thirst their water slakes—
He sleeps among them and awakes.

Deem ye my eloquence so weak ?

Have I so passionless a voice

I fail to gather what I seek—

Nor will men tremble or rejoice

At my words' will ? Nay, ye know well,
How mighty is the living spell
When the soul's speech rings audible.

I, exiled, at the Persian Court

Find refuge ; shall my woes engage

Alone a friendship of such sort

Its strength may the great wrath assuage

Poems

Of those defeated and undone
When the Greek arms stern victory won
At Salamis and Marathon ?

Nay, that their ignorant feet may speed
Securely on those secret roads
Perverse and tortuous ways which lead
Towards the Greeks' desired abodes,
They work upon my exile, throw
Love on their hate till I shall show
Their eyes the hidden things I know.

I hold the keys of war and peace—
Think not, oh, Athens ! scorn of me ;
Lest on the unthinking fields of Greece
I set the wolves of slaughter free—
Lest the dread serpent in my soul

Themistocles

Its sleepy coils at length unroll
Anhungered, and devour you whole.

Yet still within my restless blood
The living blood of Marathon—
Of Salamis yet stirs—ah ! good
It were to see the past undone
That freely I might strike—there lies
Such pain on me—hate's flames arise
To burn the sorrow from my eyes.

My flickering life unfed with hate
Would surely perish—I must live—
Nor shall in any wise abate
My spirit. Shall not the gods give
In guerdon sight of Athens yet ?
Till my feet on her stones are set
I dare not waver or forget.

Poems

Alien and silent where strange eyes
Gaze on me marvelling, I move,
Stern, obdurate—my keen replies
Earn me some fear, but little love.
I am as one who wakes and dares
Scarce sleep, lest caught in the night's snares
Death shall come on him unawares.

The king has stooped to call me friend—
We hold long converse, warily—
His balanced questions strive to rend
The veil that lies 'twixt him and me.
With half-distrustful confidence
He probes with hands nervous and tense
The inner workings of my sense.

I scheme ; yet only is this thing
Clear to my understanding—strength

Themistocles

To live, that my death, conquering,

My exiled life may cure at length—

Ah, gods ! entombed in Grecian seas,

Or Grecian lands, grant me Death's ease

Though men forget Themistocles.

DREAMS

To Sheelah

SCENE.—*A deep valley wrapped in shadow*

The Man.—His Dreams

THE MAN

HITHER they drove me, there is nothing now
To help me, they will claim their lives from me—
They will wound me with their unrelenting
wings.

(He gazes wildly round.)

The gods have wrought my soul in no wise mood
Nor worthy ; seeing they gave it human life,
And love of beauty and song and sweet desires—
Then bade it wander, lonely, over earth.
A weaver of dreams it was, yet very weak—

Dreams

Like a mere raindrop hanging on a flower
Which mirrors the blue sky and the green
grass,

Yet stays, a mirror only of fair things.

So I conceived a thousand radiant dreams—

Yet they lacked life—the fever of the world

Consumed me and the fettering hands of men.

And when I died those dreams my soul conceived

Came to me—calling eagerly for life.

But I had nothing left except my soul,

Therefore they said, ‘Your soul must pay the
price ;

Your soul must feed us scattered into shreds—

Your soul must grant us life.’ I fled from
them—

Fled with my new-born freedom hot in me—

Fled from the ancient torture of the world—

Found neither shelter nor rest, respite nor peace,

Poems

And now they drive me even to their own land,
And I must yield my soul.

*(He is surrounded by indefinite forms which
gradually grow more distinct. Eyes
gaze at him, hands stretch towards
him. He no longer tries to escape,
but remains motionless. A voice now
rises from the multitude.)*

THE VOICE

Where is my life?

THE MAN

My soul

Conceived you in the thoughtless Spring, then
came

The wasted Summer feverish with drought—
I had no longer power to bring you forth.

THE VOICE

You said : 'I will make a blossom of the world—

Dreams

The sap is parched in stem and branch and leaf,
Yet it shall bud again and shed soft scent,
And lift a fragrant odour to God's throne—
Even if my blood forms the new sap thereof.'

THE MAN

The breath of April blowing on green fields
Has power to ripen and to fructify,
Because the pleasant rain is in its breath,
But when fierce Autumn comes, what then—
what then ?

THE VOICE

I should even now have bloomed a rose in
Heaven.

You never gave me roots nor planted me,
Wherefore I claim my life.

THE MAN

Bend to my lips—
A portion of my soul awaits you—take—

Poems

*(A shadow bends down and kisses the Man's
lips. It absorbs a portion of his life
and rises, a tangible shape. Another
voice sounds.)*

THE VOICE

I have grown weary waiting for my life.
It is most pitiful to feel the pulse
Of some rich, passionate, human heart, not
mine—
The tender infinite cries of human souls—
The fervent happiness of human lips ;
These things are borne to me from distant
spheres,
And you must yield your soul to guide me
thither.

THE MAN

Spirits are sterile things, and need not life,
Nor tears, nor clashing discords of the world.

Dreams

THE VOICE

You made a little temple in your soul—
I never filled it. You with glowing hands
Promised me wreaths and garlands of fair flowers.
They blossomed not. You called me love—I
died—

You scarcely wept, and now I come again
To claim the human life you promised me.

THE MAN

The various actors in the perpetual show,
The ceaseless pageantry of mutable things,
Dazzled my eyes—I could not look on you.
Yet take your share of life from out my soul.

*(Another shadow approaches and bends down
to the Man's lips. As it rises it takes
a definite form. Another voice is heard.)*

Poems

THE VOICE

I brought you all the stars and all the moon—
I made you pathways through the realms of
space.

The song of morning winds was yours to sing,
The night possessed no song you might not
sing.

Also those vast, impenetrable seas,
Which stretch around the world and never end,
And never cease in their continuous flow,
Taught you the song of lonely rippling waves—
Showed you the sunset and the wealth of dawn
Mirrored upon the silent-breasted deep.

THE MAN

The world has many songs less strong than yours,
Which, since they are more clamorous, over-
power

Dreams

The subtler harmony. I might have sung,
I might have given another chord to life,
But discords slew the music. From my soul
Take all the life it owes you—I must die.

(A shadow draws near. All happens as before.

*The valley is now filled with the mur-
muring of a vast multitude.)*

A VOICE

The sorrow that I taught him was so deep
He might have gauged and saved the hearts of
men.

ANOTHER VOICE

He strained to drink from the goblet of the sun.
The wine was vintaged by eternity.
My wings were strong to bear him to its source.

ANOTHER VOICE

Within a charmed and never fathomed sea

Poems

Floats a fair island, fashioned in such wise
That Time's sad feet may never sojourn there,
Nor any hope, nor anguish, nor desire,
Only a spiritual and ceaseless life,
Guarded by silence fraught with harmony.

ANOTHER VOICE

Time led me through his ancient palaces—
The wonder spread therein might blind the
world,
Yet from its very blindness bring forth sight.

THE MAN

I was more lonely than the sudden light
Cast on lone hills by sunset clouds afar—
I was not strong to bend my solitude
To aught save dreams, but these could never
soar

Dreams

Strong through my strength, because my strength
was weak,—

And all my weakness has brought forth is death.

*(Each dream advances and lays its lips to the
Man's lips. It then assumes a tangible
shape. The Man is almost dead. One
shadow alone stands apart.)*

THE MAN

There is one dream most well beloved of all.
Had I been strong it would have soared above
The highest mountain peak which guards the
earth.

Heaven had proved its resting-place and shrine—
I would have yielded every pulsing breath ;
I would have left no life within my soul,
Had I been strong of will and mighty of mind.

Poems

I fed it with my blood as a little child
Is fed with mother's milk ; there was no thought
More purposeful in all my wasted life—

(He pauses.)

A little measure of soul is left to me—
Enough to wander in the eternal woods,
And to gain strength and grow again and live—
But this small portion of my soul belongs
To that most dear, that best-belovéd dream.
Why does it not come for its share of life ?

(The shadow speaks, standing apart.)

THE SHADOW

But of your very weakness I was born—
You claved to me, you gave me blood for milk,
Through the long nights and watches of the
world
I was your beacon. Since you loved me so,

Dreams

I dared not claim my little portion of life—
I fade into the darkness of all past things.
Better the dream should perish than the soul.

THE MAN

I am too weak to meet eternity.
The stream of utter oblivion bends and whirls,
And claims me with sweet promises of rest.
But thou, most dear, my best-belovéd dream,
Take thou my little soul from off my lips.
This dying sacrifice has made it strong,
And it shall sing upon my lips such things
As I have longed to sing through many a day,
And many a night, and the great world of men
Shall see thee now, no more a formless dream,
But an immortal and incorporate life—
The union of the ideal with the real.
And a great song beyond the realms of Time,

Poems

Beyond all death fraught with harmonious
strength,
Shall thrill through all the fastnesses of the
world.

*(The Man, suddenly grown strong, constrains
the dream to bend, as the others, and to
kiss his lips. His soul passes from him.
The Man is utterly dead. A vast and
hollow sigh fills the air. It passes. By
degrees the features of the shadow grow
tangible. They become the features of
the Man. He lives again. The Man
has found new life in his dream.)*

THE END



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